



OFFICES OF THE GOVERNORS

CHRISTINE O. GREGOIRE

THEODORE R. KULONGOSKI

April 15, 2009

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to applaud the bold vision and federal funding commitment of this Administration to support the existing and planned high-speed rail system in the United States. The \$8 billion for high-speed and intercity rail investments made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), further supported by the Administration's budget proposal to provide \$1 billion annually for FY 2010 through FY 2014 for high-speed rail development, are important infrastructure investments that will improve mobility, create and preserve jobs, and benefit air quality across our country.

Washington and Oregon are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Amtrak *Cascades*, our signature high-speed rail corridor service. This international corridor serves not only Washington and Oregon, but also Vancouver, British Columbia, and Canada. Growing through state and federal investment, this service has carried more than six million passengers over the last 10 years, and has shown an 82% increase in ridership since 1998. In 2008, ridership reached nearly 775,000 passengers, the most successful year in the history of the service. In November 2008, the on-time performance of the Amtrak *Cascades* reached a five-year high of 81.7%.

Amtrak *Cascades* service has grown to four daily round-trips between Portland and Seattle, with connecting service between Portland and Eugene and between Bellingham and Seattle. The service also includes one daily round trip between Seattle and Vancouver, with a second trip to be inaugurated before the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver. The *Cascades* service reduces traffic congestion, provides transportation options, creates jobs, and provides other economic benefits from the money spent by users upon reaching their destinations.

Between 1994-2007, \$782.5 million has been spent on the Amtrak *Cascades* rail line, safety and station improvements by Amtrak, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, United States federal funding sources, a regional public transit entity known as Sound Transit, localities, and the states of Washington and Oregon. In March 2007, the Province of British Columbia, BNSF Railway and Amtrak agreed to fund \$9.4 million in track and signal investments in Canada as part of the development of the second daily round trip between Seattle and Vancouver. The Amtrak *Cascades* has been and continues to be a great example of how public-private partnerships and regionally-based investment can produce a premiere passenger high-speed rail corridor.

Washington State, Oregon, and Amtrak have contributed \$316.4 million in operating support to the *Cascades* – bringing the total regional investment since 1994 to \$1.1 billion. Because of the region's long history of meaningful incremental investments in the corridor, federal funds invested to sustain and improve the system are greatly leveraged. Because the *Cascades* service has planned well for the future, both mid and long range projects have been identified and federal funds will be invested in projects that are ready to proceed.

As you develop the Department's strategic plan for high-speed rail, we ask that you consider applying the following criteria to evaluate projects proposed for ARRA or other funding, prioritizing projects that:

- Expand and improve existing successful high-speed rail service;
- Demonstrate substantial public benefits, including advancing environmental climate change goals, energy savings and congestion reduction, particularly in areas adjacent to Interstate highway systems to provide travel options along with job creation;
- Reward the efforts of States that have demonstrated prior support for a high-speed rail programs on a State, regional and local level with a track record of positive growth in terms of service and ridership;
- Build on community support for high-speed rail service and expansion; and,
- Complete program-level ready to implement and construct projects.

We urge the Department to develop a strategic plan for inter-city and high speed rail that supports existing corridors with proven track records of successful service to the public and that builds upon prior effort and investment. These criteria will focus federal support and investments to high speed rail corridors that will maximize the benefit to the nation.

We will finalize our priority list of projects supporting our Amtrak *Cascades* Mid-Range and Long-Range Plans once the Federal Rail Agency application guidance and other regulations have been developed. We look forward to working with you and the President on building a high-speed rail network that will move our transportation infrastructure into the 21st century.

Sincerely,



Christine O. Gregoire
Governor of Washington



Theodore R. Kulongoski
Governor of Oregon